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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/C, INR, DRL,
DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA;
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICAWATCHERS
BUJUMBURA AND ADDIS ABABA FOR DAS YAMAMOTO

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [CD](#) [FR](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: CHAD: FRENCH AMBASSADOR SEES DAS YAMAMOTO
VISIT AS OPPORTUNITY

REF: A. A. NDJAMENA 521

[1](#)B. B. NDJAMENA 579

Classified By: P/E Haywood Rankin for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: French Ambassador Bercot repeated his view April 20 that the only way forward was to get Deby, before the May 3 election, to announce publicly the naming of an opposition government. He saw DAS Yamamoto's visit April 24-25 as key step in moving this idea forward. He acknowledged an opposition government would be a hard sell with Deby and an even harder sell with the opposition. He recoiled at the idea of delaying the election, because he believed it would make the country even less secure; he recoiled at the idea of pursuing political dialogue, because he believed the political opposition was too divided and selfish. He expected a major rebel push just before the election, which could take a central, northern, or southern path, or all three; the central path, if it came through Abeche and especially if Sudan were directly implicated, might compel the French forces to engage in combat. Deby had just told him of his curt conversation earlier in the day with World Bank President Wolfowitz, and he thought that Deby would have oil revenues, and a supposed U.S. role as mediator, uppermost in his mind in the conversation with Yamamoto. Bercot said that he was inclining ever more to the view that France should minimize its ties to this unprofitable, ungrateful, and ungovernable country, where the United States had more of a direct interest. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador Wall called on French Ambassador Jean-Pierre Bercot April 20. He said that he particularly wanted to ensure, in the very sensitive period before the May 3 elections, that the two ambassadors, and governments, were completely clear with each other.

Impasse with the World Bank

[1](#)3. (C) Bercot said that he had just been on the telephone to President Deby, who, in exasperated tones, described a short telephone conversation he had had that day with World Bank President Wolfowitz. Deby said that "nothing had changed" in Wolfowitz's position since the two had last spoken in January. According to Deby, Wolfowitz told him that (1) the legislation

changing the basic law had to be abrogated, (2) there could be no use of oil revenues to buy arms, (3) the World Bank would have to confirm the above, and (4) henceforward, oil revenues could, as previously agreed, only be spent on poverty reduction. Bercot said that Deby was unable to conceive that President Bush would not be able to tell Wolfowitz what to do. For him, the United States was the key for unlocking the bank account at Citibank in London

Threat of New Attacks

14. (C) The Ambassador said that he had met Deby earlier in the day (before the telephone conversation with Wolfowitz) and Deby had said he anticipated an imminent rebel attack in the Adre area. Bercot said that the French analysis was that any attack this weekend would be diversionary, while there would be a major rebel attack at the time of or just before the election (i.e., in ten days' time). There were four possible routes and at this point the French did not know which was the most likely. The rebels might attack by way of Adre and head for Abeche. He doubted that Sudan would be so stupid as to attack Abeche directly. An attack on Abeche would be a serious matter for the French forces stationed there, and French involvement in combat might be a result, especially if the Sudanese were directly involved. Deby saw Abeche as the key to the country. Alternatively, the rebels could attack via Adre but move north toward Biltine and by-pass Abeche. Similarly, the rebels might take a much more northerly route, from Tine to Oum Chalouba and directly down to Ndjamena, although they would be highly exposed in the desert environment (note: exposed to attack from the air). Finally, the rebels might follow a southern strategy, going by way of Birao in Central African Republic, using numerous medium-sized units of 10-20 vehicles to move into many southern towns and sow confusion, not necessarily aiming for Ndjamena but producing enough chaos to make holding the election impossible. It was possible that

the rebels could try to do some version of all three at the same time. Meanwhile, the 150-man French force that had been sent to Ndjamena from Gabon had now returned to Gabon.

15. (C) One of the points that Bercot said he had heavily stressed with Deby was that he must not insist on Chad's right to pursue rebels into Sudanese territory, as it had in fact done repeatedly, including after the most recent fighting at Adre. Entering Sudanese territory disqualified Chad from complaining about Sudanese infringement on Chadian territory. There was also the nettlesome issue of how Sudanese the rebels were (he believed that the April 13 attack on Ndjamena involved a high percentage of Sudanese, in addition to all the equipment and arms) and the extent to which Chad was now using Darfur rebels to attack Chadian rebels. Each side could legitimately accuse the other, while each side could make a color of argument that it was not "directly" involved.

U.S. Views on the Oil Issue, Rebel Violence, and Elections

16. (C) The Ambassador said that he had discussed the oil-revenues question with Deby, clarifying that the imminent visit of DAS Yamamoto was long-planned and was not intended to pursue any mediation between Chad and the World Bank but rather pursue discussion of a range of issues. Bercot said that, from his conversations with Deby, Deby believed the U.S. was ready to mediate the oil-revenue issue as well as "solve" the problem of security for the refugee camps. Bercot recognized that the internal political impasse was the core of Yamamoto's visit, but Yamamoto would certainly have to confront oil.

17. (C) The Ambassador said that he had provided to Deby statements that the Embassy derived from recent State Department guidance that called for an end of rebel violence, including Sudanese support, and for political dialogue. The Ambassador also drew to Bercot's attention the Deputy Secretary's remarks at Brookings Institute on April 13 calling for a different political process in Chad in order to avoid future rebel attacks and noting that, while there was a Sudanese dimension, there was also an internal dimension, in a country where there had not been a satisfactory coming together of the regime and some of the opposition for either a fair election or inclusive political process. Bercot said that he found Zoellick's remarks well-balanced. He had told Deby that he would not be able to avoid confronting Chad's massive internal problems and

that he must speed up improvement in governance. Unfortunately, the opposition was of low quality and had not even condemned the rebel attacks. The Ambassador noted that two important opposition leaders, Lol Mahamat Choua and Ibni Oumar, had just given interviews to the foreign press in which they condemned the rebel attacks. Bercot said that they needed to make such condemnation not to foreign journalists but to the Chadian audience. The Ambassador said that Yamamoto would be seeing many of the opposition leaders and would have the opportunity to make this point.

¶18. (C) The Ambassador reviewed his trip with journalists the previous day to Goz Beida and Goz Amer. He said the journalists had asked whether it was possible to go forward with elections in the present context of bitterness and violence, to which he had responded that the United States called for political dialogue in Chad and that elections were one subject for dialogue. When the journalists asked whether the election should be delayed, he had responded that this issue was for the Chadian people to decide. Bercot said that a delay of the election would carry huge dangers. The rebels would have a field day claiming that they were responsible for the delay and they would redouble their attacks. The Security Council would have to legitimate the prolongation of the President's mandate. France would not be able to provide security in an environment of much greater insecurity engendered by the constitutional gap.

A Plan for a Political Way Out

¶19. (C) The way forward, Bercot said, was for Deby to declare before the election that he was going to appoint a prime minister from the opposition, who would have a completely free hand to nominate his cabinet and who would govern for one year until truly free elections could be organized for the National Assembly, whereupon the next government would be appointed from the legislative majority. Bercot said that he had presented to

Deby his own list of suggested Cabinet members, which was entirely made up of the leading members of the opposition coalition CPDC (note: Yorongar is absent):

Lol Mahamat Choua, Prime Minister
Wadal Abdelkader Kamougue, Defense Minister
Saleh Kebzabo, Finance Minister
Salibou Garba, Treasury Minister
Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh, Education Minister
Jacqueline Moudeina, Justice Minister.

¶110. (C) The Ambassador asked when Bercot had confronted Deby with this proposal and what his reaction had been. Bercot said it had been just before the April 13 events, and Deby had been shocked. Deby had asked if the proposal were official, and Bercot said no. Deby had said, "It could work," which Bercot took to be neither a yes nor a no. He had not talked to Deby about the proposal afterward, given the events of April 13. He had told Paris what he had done. Paris's view at present, he said, was simply one of being totally fed up with Chad. It was getting beaten in the media. It did not want Chad to fall apart in the lead-up to the next French election.

¶111. (C) The Ambassador said that the United States wanted to find ways to work most effectively together to encourage a political initiative to break the political impasse in Chad. France was very exposed, and the United States did not want to do anything to make France's position more difficult. Yamamoto's objective was to hear from the players in Chad to assist in developing a forceful message, in coordination with the French.

Harsh Views of the Opposition

¶112. (C) Bercot lamented that all sides left so much to be desired. Here was a stupid government that was no good at public relations, and a stupid opposition that did not stand up for democracy but rather bet on maximum chaos. Bercot had pressed Deby to receive journalists, in the hopes he would highlight his many positive accomplishments for Chad (among them a remarkably free press and civil society and vigorously vocal opposition), and what had he done? He had told them that, yes, of course he would use oil revenues to buy weapons! As for the opposition, they had dallied with the rebels, and even

Bercot's favorite, Lol Mahamat Choua, probably did not have the courage or foresight to rise to the occasion and seize the prime ministership. Bercot cited an article from that day's opposition newspaper Le Temps, which lifted verbatim a European Union cable on Chad that had been leaked from Brussels. The cable (not penned by Bercot, he affirmed, while broadly hinting that the German Charge was the author) was a cool articulate condemnation of all sides in Chad, but Le Temps, typical of the opposition, had seen it as yet one more manifestation of French disdain for and manipulation of Chad.

Delivering a Message

¶13. (C) Bercot urged that Yamamoto seize the occasion of his visit, coming at such a crucial moment for Chad, to assure Deby of U.S. support if he would release power to the opposition and make such an announcement before the election. The Ambassador remarked that Paris and Washington had not yet coordinated such a message and Yamamoto was nearly here. Bercot regretted that a French minister would not be able to come to Ndjamena in this period -- it would be foolish to bring in someone at a high level, as the opposition would instantly see a nefarious plot. No, Yamamoto would have to do the work. The Ambassador asked whether President Chirac were prepared to deliver the message himself directly. Bercot dodged the question. The Ambassador put it again, and Bercot dodged it again.

¶14. (C) The Ambassador said he saw potential in Bercot's plan but he doubted that the opposition would accept, as their distrust and resentment ran so deep -- they would never believe Deby would let go enough. Perhaps it was worth a try. Bercot said that Paris wanted to avoid being seen as the party presenting the solution. Any French proposal would be seen as a trap. The Ambassador said, apart from the opposition ever believing Deby, it was open to question whether Deby would ever accept any proposal that purported to reduce his power. Bercot said he was more optimistic about Deby buying in than the opposition. Yamamoto would not have to be specific, for example,

suggesting names. Yamamoto could say that the American and French ambassadors would see him alone in the coming days before May 3 to flesh out the plan. The Ambassador said that the idea would need much more work. Bercot said there was no time. There was a little grace period of relative quiet right now which might last through Yamamoto's visit.

Fears for Chad's Future

¶15. (C) The Ambassador asked why, as Bercot had so low an opinion of the opposition and their willingness and ability to participate responsibly in the plan he was putting forward, he gave his plan any chance to succeed? Bercot said that however little chance there was, he believed it was the only possible way forward. There were never easy or good solutions in Chad, only approaches that might reduce the chance of horrible results. After two and a half years as French ambassador in Chad, he had come to the conclusion that Chad did not deserve the attention that France had given it. It would be better to revert to the former French plan to pull out of the country. The United States now had a much greater interest in stabilizing Chad, where any foreign involvement was extremely expensive. France had obtained nothing but insults from Chadians across the spectrum. Chad had every potential to become a "small Iraq." Bercot said he offered his best idea on a way forward. He was pleased that he would not be in Chad -- he was looking forward to getting away from this miserable country -- to see first hand whether it bore fruit after one year, but he deeply hoped it would succeed.

Comment

¶16. (C) Neither our past experience nor our current contacts with Deby and the opposition gives any grounds for optimism that either side is ready to accept or even seriously consider the plan outlined by Bercot. It nonetheless represents the basis of a possible practical way forward, and we would like to explore it further. At this stage, it appears to be an idea dreamed up by a frustrated French Ambassador. Before pursuing it with the Chadians, we would want to make sure Paris is on board and prepared to sell it to Deby. The French would look to us to raise it with the opposition, since their ties with its leading representatives are frayed, if not outright hostile. At no point would we want this to be branded as an "American initiative." Rather

it should be broached as an approach that Chadians could develop as a way of breaking the current impasse.

¶17. (C) For DAS Yamamoto's visit, we would welcome being able to deliver a letter with an authoritative statement of our position. Otherwise, we would stick at this stage to stressing that dialogue has to start now on the terms of a political solution to the problems tearing Chad apart. We should seek commitments from Deby on dramatic initiatives he needs to take, if not before, then soon after the May 3 elections (i.e., a proposal for an opposition government, his participation in a national "round table, "a promise of new and credible elections, an announcement of plans to step down within a set timeframe). Without some positive movement on his part, we should let Deby and the French know of our intention to issue a public statement that stands up for our principles and registers our concerns.

WALL

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